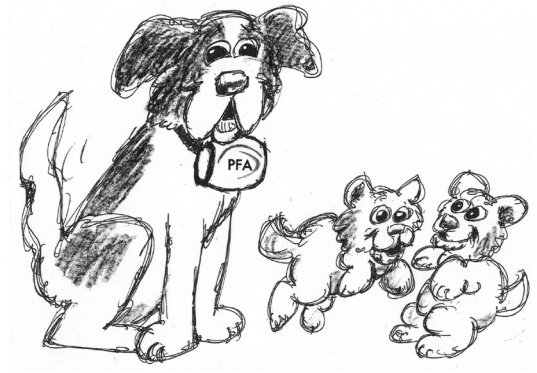


Appendix B: Guidelines for Using PFA-S in a Group Format



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PFA Guidelines for Assemblies

Following a school emergency, school leaders may hold an assembly to present themselves to staff and students to reassure those in attendance that the leadership is actively involved and in control. At an assembly, school leaders should (1) provide information about the event, (2) describe available resources, and (3) give psychoeducation about potential reactions. *Do not implement PFA in an assembly or other large group format.* You may describe the basic elements of PFA-S during an assembly, and then apply PFA-S techniques in smaller follow-up groups.

Caution:

If a school chooses to have an assembly, assign non-distressed adults to watch for students who appear emotionally overwhelmed. Be prepared to make alternative arrangements for these students, such as having adults accompany them to a safe, supervised location, if they cannot or choose not to participate in the assembly. Students who find it difficult to sit still and pay attention in large groups will likely find it even harder to do so during a time of emotional stress.

If a student has died, speak with the family before sharing information. As time passes, continue to talk to the family about any additional information you wish to share with the students and staff. Notify the school community of the death of a student or staff member only in small groups, not in a large assembly.

Follow these steps when leading an assembly:

Step 1: Preparation and Introduction

- Don't do it alone! No one person should run an assembly. In addition to speakers, have at least one adult assistant per 10-20 students. Assistants can stand at the periphery of the auditorium and provide support to students who become distraught or try to leave.
- Be sensitive to the needs of young children, who can be overstimulated by the crowding and noise or large auditorium settings. Allow parents to attend an assembly with young children to provide them with comfort and support.
- Have PFA-S providers and/or mental health professionals on hand to support those students and staff who need it.
- Introduce yourself and highlight the strengths of the school.
- Introduce any new staff members or resource persons who are part of the recovery efforts (e.g., PFA-S providers, mental health professionals, additional security).
- Point out the assistants and explain their role.

Step 2: Describe the Purpose

- Explain that the purpose of the assembly is to provide information about what is happening and to describe the resources that are available to help in the school's recovery.
- If the assembly is open to parents or other community members, announce this and welcome them.

Step 3: Provide Information

- Report only the facts about the incident that have been validated by emergency command.
- Be aware of the developmental level of the students in the assembly and target your information to their level.
- Address and dispel rumors.
- Provide psychoeducation about the types of reactions that students and staff can expect to experience now and in the near future.
- When appropriate, have experts present who can describe technical aspects of the situation (e.g., a police officer can describe the safety procedures; an engineer can address air quality concerns).
- Limit the information to that which the school community needs to know and can handle. Do not discuss the event in detail. Make sure you get parent consent before giving any information about a particular child.
- Identify any changes to the school routine or environment (e.g., more security on campus, modified test schedules, that the gym is being used as a shelter).

Step 4: Moments of Silence

- Consider a moment of silence near the beginning of the assembly in honor of those impacted by the event.
- Do not have a moment of silence at the end of an assembly.
- Do not let the assembly become a memorial service. Memorials may occur later in a more appropriate setting.

Step 5: Discuss the Resources Available

- Describe the assistance available at the school and in the community.
- Describe the referral process and any funding options for additional services (e.g., Victims of Crime, American Red Cross).
- Review the steps that the community and responders are taking to address safety concerns.
- Briefly describe PFA-S; describe when and where PFA-S services are available.

Step 6: Describe How the School Will Move Forward

- Discuss the steps the school and the district will take to recover and the ways that administrators, staff, and students can actively participate.
- Provide a concrete plan for how students and staff can get ongoing assistance.

PFA Guidelines for Classroom Interventions

The classroom is a familiar setting that helps reestablish routine and fosters students' supporting one another. Take into account the developmental level of the students and modify interventions accordingly. Where a classroom has been the site of a violent incident or the death of a student or teacher, modify these guidelines to address this and spend more time with this group. Try to implement PFA-S early in the day, so that teachers and staff can observe student reactions and provide appropriate support.

Classroom Alert:

Providing PFA-S in the classroom can give students the information they need and teach them ways to cope, while allowing them to support and comfort each other. Although they are in the same class and know each other, students may have vastly different experiences of the event. Structure the session so that students do not become distressed by their classmates' descriptions of their experience. If students do spend time talking or drawing pictures about the event, reserve time before the group ends to focus on more hopeful thoughts and to teach them skills for coping with their feelings.

Structure the group by saying something like:

“Even though you all are part of the same class and you all went through the event, you each had a different experience. Because the group is time limited, we won't be able to hear in detail what happened to each of you. What's actually more helpful is for you to problem-solve with each other and to learn helpful ways to cope with the feelings and thoughts you are having. We will update you about what has been happening and about the kinds of resources available to help you during this difficult time.”

Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

- Conduct the group with another provider.
- Before the group, have the teacher identify any student who may need to be excused from this intervention or who is the subject of concern.
- Include the teacher in the discussion so that s/he can address questions that may arise at a later date. When a teacher has died, have a staff member who knows the students well participate in the intervention.
- Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the meeting. Have the other provider introduce him/herself.
- If a student is highly emotional or needs to leave the classroom, assist him/her privately. Have a “safe room” or other setting in the school where students can go for respite or support.

Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

- Provide information about the event and attempt to dispel rumors and clarify any misunderstandings.
- Announce support services that the school and/or community are currently offering or will offer in the near future.
- Discuss the steps the district and/or school are taking to recover from the incident and answer any questions the students have.
- Address safety concerns and describe safety procedures that the school is implementing.
- Indicate how challenging a time it may be for some students.
- If a death has occurred, acknowledge that some individuals may be grieving and will express their grief in a variety of ways. Validate and facilitate the normal process of grieving, and inform students how to obtain continuing support and services.
- Discourage memorial displays within the classroom, as students may have very different reactions to them. Allow discussion on handling the deceased's belongings (e.g., artwork may go to a girl's parents; a boy's picture may remain up for a period of time).

Core Action 3: Stabilization

- If a student needs stabilization, assist him/her individually.
- Have enough adults on hand to escort overwhelmed students to a quiet, private place outside the group setting, at which time a PFA-S provider can work to stabilize the student.
- Help students put words to their feelings and concerns. Answer any questions they have; help them to understand their own emotions and reduce their distress about their overwhelmed classmates.

Core Action 4: Information Gathering

- Your ability to gather information is more limited in a classroom than in a small group or one-on-one setting.
- Remind students that you do not need in-depth descriptions of what happened but some basic information to address their current needs and concerns.
- Ask questions that encourage yes or no responses to help limit too much discussion.
- Redirect students who provide too many details of the event by reminding them of the purpose of this meeting.
- Keep the group focused on the task at hand, and do not allow one student or a small group of students to divert the conversation.

Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

- Problem-solve and address students' practical needs, especially those related to academic and school functioning.
- Demonstrate how students can reach out to others so that their needs can be met.
- Tell students where they can find donated resources or services they need.
- Encourage the teacher to develop goals for the classroom and a way to chart the class's progress as they move forward. Help the students to see that they may have resources to share with others in the school community or that they could lend a helping hand.

Core Action 6: Connections with Social Supports

- Discuss ways that students can help each other.
- Inform students of activities and recovery efforts for which they may volunteer.
- Stress the importance of mutual aid among the students. Brainstorm ways students can work together to help themselves and others.
- Urge students to alert a teacher, parent, or other adult when concerned about a peer. Help them to identify an adult who can be alerted and give them that adult's contact information.

Core Action 7: Information on Coping

- Provide psychoeducation about the range of responses students might have in a crisis.
- Describe coping strategies that other students have found effective.
- Provide referrals for one-on-one services to those wishing more individualized attention.
- Encourage self-care practices and routines.
- Address potential problems related to sleep, mood, and academic functioning.
- Discuss the role of reminders and ways of managing them.
- Reestablish the learning environment by returning to the pre-event schedule and routine as much as possible.

Core Action 8: Linkages with Collaborative Services

- Let students know the ways they can obtain individualized services.
- Connect students with appropriate support persons and relief or social assistance agencies.
- Finish the intervention with a discussion of constructive and/or prosocial activities that can promote recovery.
- Follow up with the teacher to monitor any significant emotional reactions the students may display after their participation in the group. Make appropriate referrals as needed.
- Encourage the teacher to schedule regular times to answer students' questions and to discuss recovery efforts.
- Select someone (possibly the co-leader) to follow up with students regarding any referrals or linkages with other services that you gave.

After conducting classroom interventions, always remember to take time for yourself. Be a good role-model, practice good self-care!

PFA Guidelines for Small Groups: Students/Staff with Varied Experiences

You may use PFA-S with small groups to provide information, address safety issues, provide psychoeducation, enhance coping, encourage members of the group to support each other, and review services offered by the school and community. Groups may form spontaneously or you may group students (or staff) together, but individual members will have had vastly different experiences of the emergency (life threat, only media exposure, death of a close friend, etc.). Because the group members have had varying experiences, do not allow them to discuss their individual experiences in detail. Instead, focus on the purpose of the meeting, and encourage understanding and respect for the different experiences and reactions.

Caution:

The small group format allows students (or staff) with varied experiences to support one another during this crisis phase and the recovery period to follow. Take precautions, however, to protect individuals with low levels of exposure from hearing others describe their traumatic experience in detail. Interrupt such discussions and refocus group members on learning ways to cope with their feelings and thoughts. Tell them to alert you or the co-leader if they begin to experience intense negative emotions. (Have an adult available to escort the person to a private area where s/he can recover). Likewise, let group members know how to get one-on-one support outside of the group if they want to talk more about their experiences.

Group students together who are close in age and at a similar maturity level. Whenever possible, meet with children in preschool and kindergarten in their own classroom with their teacher (in this case, use handout *PFA – Guidelines for Classroom Intervention*). Keep in mind that young children seek more physical comfort than older students, need frequent snack and restroom breaks, require more help with tasks, and need information presented to them in simple, concrete terms.

You can introduce and structure the group by saying something like:

“Members of this group had very different experiences during the event. Because of this and the limited time we have, we will not talk in detail about what happened to each of you. Instead, we’ll do what will be most helpful: update you about what has been happening, teach you practical ways to cope with the feelings you are having, and tell you about the support services that are available to help you during this difficult time.”

The following is a structure for conducting a small group of individuals with varied experiences. It's important to note that it is not necessary to implement all of the bulleted items in each core action, or even to implement all the core actions. Engage the students, observe what is being shared, and utilize different core actions to assist with their concerns.

Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

- Conduct the group with another provider, preferably someone familiar to the students/staff.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the meeting. Have the other provider introduce him/herself.
- Create a comforting presence in the room that encourages participation and acceptance of others' thoughts, emotions, and behavior.
- Have each of the members introduce him- or herself.
- Let group members know that if a student or staff member feels overwhelmed, the co-leader will help him/her individually.

Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

- Provide information about the event and the available services. Dispel rumors and clarify misunderstandings or misinformation.
- Address any safety concerns and identify any new safety procedures in place.
- Acknowledge that it is a hard time for everyone.
- Discuss the steps that the district and/or school are taking to recover from the incident, and answer any questions the group may have.
- Answer younger children's questions simply. Tell them only what they need to know.

Core Action 3: Stabilization

- Meet individually with any student/staff needing stabilization.
- Have enough adults on hand to escort an overwhelmed student or staff member to a quiet, private place outside of the group, at which time, a PFA-S provider can stabilize him/her.
- Encourage the remaining individuals to talk about their feelings and concerns, so that they can understand and gain control of their emotions. Monitor the concerns and contain them if they go beyond what is helpful for the group.

Core Action 4: Information Gathering

- If members of the group appear distressed, conduct a neutral group activity, such as a relaxation exercise.
- Use a screening form or ask specific (yes/no) questions to determine the group members' needs and concerns.
- Keep the group focused on the task, identifying needs and providing information.
- Redirect students who provide too many details of the event by reminding them of the purpose of the meeting.

Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

- Problem-solve and address students' and staff members' practical needs.
- Suggest ways they can reach out to others to meet their needs.
- Tell them where they can find donated resources or services that they need.

Core Action 6: Connections with Social Supports

- Discuss ways that group members can help each other.
- Inform them of activities and recovery efforts for which they may volunteer.
- Stress the importance of mutual aid among the members. Brainstorm ways that they can work together to help themselves and others.
- Identify resources available if they start feeling overwhelmed when supporting their peers.
- Help identify an adult that they can alert if they become concerned about another peer.

Core Action 7: Information on Coping

- Provide psychoeducation about the range of responses students/staff can have in a crisis.
- Describe coping strategies that other people have found effective.
- Encourage self-care practices and routines.
- Address potential concerns related to sleep, mood, and academic functioning.
- Discuss the role of reminders and ways to manage them.

Core Action 8: Linkages with Collaborative Services

- Remind students/staff that they may feel better after the group, but that some of their difficult feelings (such as sadness, worry) may return and that they should practice good self-care.
- Identify ways to access more individualized services.
- Connect members to appropriate support persons and relief or social assistance agencies.
- Check with teachers following the group session to monitor students who display significant emotional reactions after group. Make appropriate referrals.
- Follow up (or have the co-leader do so) with students/staff regarding referrals you gave.
- Delineate the resources and expertise available within the school community.
- End the intervention with a discussion of constructive and/or prosocial activities that can promote recovery, including ways members can support each other.

After conducting the group intervention, always remember to take time for yourself. Be a good role-model practice good self-care!

PFA Guidelines for Small Groups: Students/Staff with Similar Experiences

You may use PFA-S with small groups of students/staff to provide information, address safety issues, provide psychoeducation, enhance coping, encourage members of the group to support each other, and review services offered by the school and the community. When the groups are comprised of students or staff who have had similar traumatic experiences, you can tailor the intervention to address the common experiences that they share (e.g., all are friends of a student who committed suicide or all suffered injuries when a building collapsed).

The small group format allows students/staff members who have shared traumatic experiences to support each other and to feel less isolated. The group also provides a forum to discuss reactions to the event. Although students/staff members may have been similarly exposed, their responses may vary greatly depending on their personal characteristics and previous experiences. Thus, this group is not an appropriate forum for disclosing in depth or for discussing vivid details. Keeping the students/staff members on task may become challenging as individuals start to share the specifics of the event and their emotions heighten. Focus the group on learning practical ways to help themselves and each other cope.

Group students together who are close in age and at a similar maturity level. Whenever possible, meet with children in preschool and kindergarten in their own classroom with their teacher (in this case, use *handout PFA – Guidelines for Classroom Intervention*). Keep in mind that young children seek more physical comfort than older students, need frequent snack and restroom breaks, require more help with tasks, and need information presented to them in simple, concrete terms.

A shared-experience group may require more careful planning to keep individuals from feeling overwhelmed. You might (1) plan your agenda, including defining your responsibilities and those of your co-leader; (2) think through specific language to use to refocus group members as needed; (3) select a relaxation skill to teach—such as a breathing exercise—to calm and refocus the group, and (4) locate a nearby “break area.” Agree to facilitate these groups ONLY if you have time to plan, are not currently feeling overwhelmed yourself, and have a support system or coping plan to help you manage the difficult emotions that often arise after leading such a group. If you have not led groups, try to co-lead with someone who is experienced.

Introduce the group by explaining its purpose:

“We are going to find helpful ways to cope with the terrible thing that has happened and to help each other solve the immediate problems you face. You may want to talk about what happened to you—what you saw, heard, and felt. Right now, however, what will help you the most is to learn how to deal with the intense feelings and thoughts, rather than dwell on them. Today we want each of you to leave the group with some specific tools to help you cope with these intense feelings and thoughts. Also, we will update you about what has been happening and what support services are available. By the way, it is common for people in a group like this to feel emotional or need to take a break. If this happens to you, just signal a group leader, and one of us will show you where to go. You can come back to the group when you’re ready.”

The following is a structure for conducting a small group with shared experiences. It's important to note that it is not necessary to implement all of the bulleted items in each core action, or even to implement all the core actions. Engage the students, observe what is being shared, and utilize different core actions to assist with their concerns.

Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

- Conduct the group with another provider, preferably someone who is familiar to the students/staff.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the meeting.
- Acknowledge to group members that, while they have had similar experiences, their responses may be very different.
- Create a comforting presence in the room that encourages participation and acceptance of others' thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
- Have each of the members introduce him- or herself.
- In a group where all the members are grieving or have had a life-threatening event, expect some individuals to express intense negative reactions. To make sure that group members do not become too overwhelmed, set parameters at the beginning by describing how you will handle these situations (i.e., if someone feels overwhelmed, there's a place he/she can go to take a break; if the discussion gets side-tracked, you will refocus the group; if a student or staff member needs individual support, the co-leader will provide that).
- Maintain a calm and comforting presence at all times. Young children, in particular, are keenly aware of adults' stress or fear.

Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

- Provide information about the event and the available services. Dispel rumors and clarify any misunderstanding or misinformation in an age-appropriate manner.
- Address safety concerns and identify what safety procedures are being implemented.
- Acknowledge that it is a hard time for everyone.
- Discuss the steps the district and/or school are taking to recover from the incident and answer any questions the group may have.
- Answer younger children's questions simply. Tell them only what they need to know.
- If a death has occurred, acknowledge that some individuals are grieving and that they will express that grief in a variety of ways. Validate and facilitate the normal process of grieving and tell group members how to access continuing support and services.
- Acknowledge if group members have specific concerns that are not shared by others (e.g., part of criminal proceedings, medical treatment needs, grieving best friend).

Core Action 3: Stabilization

- If a student/staff member needs stabilization, see him/her individually.
- If many group members are upset, have them do a neutral activity such as a relaxation exercise.
- Have enough adults on hand to escort an overwhelmed student or staff member to a quiet, private place outside of the group setting, at which time a PFA-S provider can stabilize him/her.
- Encourage the remaining individuals to talk about their feelings and concerns, so that they can understand and gain control of their emotions.

Core Action 4: Information Gathering

- Facilitate a discussion to determine the group members' needs and concerns.
- Redirect students who provide too many details of the event by reminding them of the purpose of the meeting. Though this is not the setting to discuss individual's unique experiences in detail, working with small groups with similar experiences decreases the likelihood that they will be exposed to details of the event with which they were not previously familiar.

Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

- Problem-solve and address students' and staff members' practical needs.
- Suggest ways they can reach out to others to have their needs met.
- Tell them where they can find donated resources or services that they need.
- Address the unique needs of the group (e.g., discuss the medical issues of students with serious injuries or provide resources for students/staff members whose homes were destroyed).

Core Action 6: Connections with Social Supports

- Discuss ways that group members can help each other.
- Inform them of activities and recovery efforts for which they may volunteer.
- Stress the importance of mutual aid among the members. Brainstorm ways that they can work together to help themselves and others.
- Identify resources available if they start to feel overwhelmed when supporting their peers.
- Help identify an adult to alert if an individual becomes concerned about another peer.

Core Action 7: Information on Coping

- Provide psychoeducation about the range of responses students can have in a crisis.
- Describe coping strategies that others have found effective.
- Encourage self-care practices and routines.
- Address potential problems related to sleep, mood, and academic functioning.
- Discuss the role of reminders and ways to manage them.

Core Action 8: Linkages with Collaborative Services

- Remind students/staff that they may feel better after the group, but that some of their difficult feelings (such as sadness, worry) may return and to practice good self-care.
- Identify ways that they can get more individualized services.
- Connect members to appropriate support persons and relief or social assistance agencies.
- Follow up with teachers after group to monitor students who displayed significant emotional reactions. Make appropriate referrals as needed.
- Follow up (or have the co-leader do so) with students/staff regarding referrals you gave them.
- End the intervention with a discussion of constructive and/or prosocial activities that can promote recovery, including ways members can support each other.

Always remember to take time for yourself. Be a good role-model practice good self-care!